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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#) [AO](#) [CF](#)
SUBJECT: POLICE OPERATION AGAINST BDK MILITANTS IN
BAS-CONGO LEAVES AT LEAST 22 DEAD

REF: A. KINSHASA 25

[B](#). 07 KINSHASA 350
[C](#). 07 KINSHASA 134

Classified By: PolCouns D. Brown, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#). (SBU) Summary. February 28-29 clashes in Bas-Congo province between police and partisans of the Bunda dia Kongo (BDK) politico-religious movement have left at least 22 dead following weeks of government inaction in response to a wave of intimidation and violence by BDK militants, primarily in Luozi and Seke Banza territories northwest and north of the provincial capital of Matadi. No Americans have been reported affected by the clashes or related violence. Interior Minister Kalume told Security Council ambassadors he ordered police reinforcements to affected areas in order to re-establish state authority following appeals by church leaders, many of whose pastors have been terrorized, kidnapped or forced to flee by the militants. The operation is ongoing, accompanied by reports of indiscriminate use of force by both sides. Kalume blamed BDK leader Nsemi for the situation; Nsemi claimed the operation was aimed at discrediting him. Separately, both agreed on the need to for a roundtable conference to resolve longstanding conflict and tensions. End summary.

[2](#). (SBU) Police and militants of the politico-religious movement Bunda dia Kongo (BDK) clashed February 28 and 29 in Luozi territory, 235 km northeast of the Bas-Congo capital Matadi, following a decision by Interior Minister Gen. Denis Kalume to send in the newly-trained 7th Battalion of the Rapid Intervention Police (PIR) to establish order after a series of violent incidents directed at pastors, teachers, government officials and non-Kongo residents by young BDK toughs. Kalume convoked Security Council ambassadors late in the afternoon of March 3 to present documents and video supporting his decision, including the graphic testimony of a Catholic priest, Fr. Andre Mingiedi, who endured an excruciating 12-hour torture by members of BDK's Makesa militia January 21.

[3](#). (SBU) We have received no reports of Americans affected by the clash or related violence. DAO cancelled a planned visit to the province by a group of 17 Air War College students. MONUC Force Commander General Gaye told the ambassadors that MONUC had reinforced its police and military detachments in the provincial capital of Matadi and in Seke Banza territory north of Matadi, where a January 5 confrontation between police and militants left six dead and six wounded (ref A).

[4](#). (SBU) Kalume insistently told the ambassadors that the

death toll stood at seven, dismissing attempts by several Europeans to flag higher numbers cited by local sources or press reports. MONUC's Radio Okapi has floated figures of up to a dozen injured. Kalume said some militants had fled north into Congo-Brazzaville and Angola's Cabinda enclave, drawing expressions of concern from the Angolan ambassador. According to Okapi, Bas-Congo Governor Simon Mbatshi told the press the same day that 22 people had been killed, although it was not clear whether he was referring to the operation in Luozi alone or to other areas as well.

¶15. (SBU) Kalume reported that he and Mbatshi visited Luozi town March 2. He presented a video from their visit showing a burnt-out church and jeep, two dead bodies -- apparently of a woman and a child -- and testimony of victims. These included several residents born outside the province who told stories of ill-treatment and intimidation by BDK militants, whose creed foresees the millennial re-establishment of an ethnically-pure Kongo kingdom in parts of modern Congo-Kinshasa, Congo-Brazzaville and Angola (ref B). Mbatshi also appeared on the tape, recounting in Kikongo (helpfully translated by Kalume) to a crowd that the confrontation began on the evening of February 28 when militants began stoning recently-arrived police, who responded with tear gas.

¶16. (SBU) Details of the operation remain sketchy, but it is ongoing. Most reports, including Kalume's briefing, allege indiscriminate use of force, multiple house-burnings and murder by police and/or militants. MONUC analysts who briefed us on the situation earlier in the day March 3 cited culpability on both sides. They noted accusations that Congolese police shot up a BDK church during a prayer service February 28 in Luozi, police-BDK confrontations there the following day and March 2 allegations from an NGO source of

police setting houses on fire in the village of Kikenge, 57 km from Luozi. MONUC and Okapi have also received reports of further clashes in Kikenge and the nearby villages of Bandakani and Lufuku, houses burnt in Lufuku -- including that of the local head of the Salvation Army -- and bodies carried away or thrown in the river. An Okapi report March 4, citing civil society, pointed to shooting in Seke Banza town and burning of government agents' houses there.

¶17. (SBU) Kalume said he ordered the deployment in the aftermath of an appeal to Mbatshi last week by bishops of the Eglise du Christ au Congo (ECC), an influential evangelical church with close ties to President Kabila. The bishops' letter demanded restoration of state authority in areas of the province plagued by acts of intimidation, assault and murder by BDK Makesa dating June 2007 and targeting state, church and school authorities. Kalume repeated claims that Makesa had taken over border posts and police stations. He also played a video of a press conference the same week by the province's head ECC bishop, in which the bishop recited a litany of outrages directed by militants against members of other religious groups -- Protestant, Catholic and Kimbanguist -- their suppression of the national flag and anthem at schools in favor of BDK's, and banning of religious services at the churches' own schools.

¶18. (SBU) Kalume said he made the decision to intervene after viewing the video, including Mingiedi's testimony of torture, and calling in Mbatshi and several Bas-Congo deputies for consultations. He said he had acted on the basis that BDK actions were: a) violent -- Makesa had burned two men to death in Kikenge the previous weekend after condemning them in a BDK court known as a Zikwa, and buried others alive; b) intolerant -- aimed at the province's three Christian denominations; c) xenophobic -- targeted non-Kongo residents of the province; and d) insurrectional -- militants were systematically dismantling the apparatus of the state.

¶19. (SBU) Kalume said he had met with BDK spiritual leader and National Assembly Deputy Ne Muanda Nsemi last week to urge him to help stop the violence, told him of the acts committed in his name and presented him photos of victims burned alive

by the militants. A joint declaration February 26 by Nsemi and the province's Catholic bishops condemned violence and threats against religious figures as not in accord with the BDK's teachings about respect for human life. It also stated that freedom of religion is at the heart of the culture of the Kongo people.

¶10. (SBU) Nsemi has called again for a roundtable conference, a longtime demand of many of the province's residents. Kalume told the ambassadors he was in favor of a conference, but expressed frustration at Nsemi. He said he had asked Nsemi to accompany him and Mbatshi on their visit to the province, but Nsemi begged off. "What is clear," said Kalume, "is that he is directing this," and noted that the National Assembly has not acted on previous requests to lift Nsemi's parliamentary immunity. Nsemi denied all accusations in a March 1 interview with Okapi, claiming he was the victim of a plot aimed at discrediting him and causing trouble in the province.

¶11. (SBU) Kalume said the government's objective is to restore state authority and enable the pastors who have fled to return home and resume their work. Gaye observed that the situation was urgent, and had been building for a long time. National Police Inspector General John Numbi reported that the situation was under control, with police working to restore security and support the rule of law.

¶12. (C) Comment: MONUC's lead BDK analyst portrays the current situation as an outgrowth of a tendency by many people in the province to resolve problems by turning to BDK, rather than state institutions, which they view as weak and corrupt. He noted, however, that BDK's effectiveness has rested on its use of violence. In fact, this situation has been building since the Seke Banza incident early in the year, which took place as the spotlight was turning to the Kivus peace and security conference. Attention to Bas-Congo by the government and the international press has suffered as a result. Even Human Rights Watch, which conducted an investigation into last year's deadly clashes between security forces and BDK militants (ref C), was unaware of anything out of the ordinary when we raised the issue with its respected senior researcher February 28. End comment.

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